



## Forgotten Legacy of Saṃmitīya School

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### Abstract

*Buddhist history shows that Saṃmitīya school has been an influential Buddhist sect in the past. On the one hand, it stood unique, holding an unconventional view like pudgalavāda, which seemingly appears against anātmavāda; on the other, it remained dominant in many places as a significant branch of early Buddhism. It regarded pudgala as bhāra-hāra, the burden bearer of pañca-skandha, the building blocks of life. Nevertheless, many Buddhists viewed pudgala as an Atman and rejected it, for to be a Buddhist is not to accept the existence of Ātma translated as soul. Saṃmitīya's influence can also be noticed in Nepal. The paper delves into revealing the legacy of Saṃmitīya and tracing its existence in Nepal.*

**Keywords:** Saṃmitīya, Pudgalvada, anātmavada, pañca-skandha, Pudgala

### Background

The unitary Buddhist Saṅgha formed by the Buddha broke off into two factions—*Sthaviravāda* and *Mahāsāṅghika* nearly one hundred years after the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*. The tendency of division continued on the basis of philosophical and disciplinary disputes, and by the time of Asoka (272-232 BC), at least eighteen *nikāyas* were formed.<sup>1</sup> Due to further changes, the sects proliferated to about 34 sects whose presence was revealed by various Buddhist literature.<sup>2</sup> The followers of all the fractions claimed to have sincerely adhered to teachings of the Buddha. General understanding has it that those fractions rooted to *Sthaviravāda* were orthodox while those from *Mahāsāṅghika* unorthodox. *Saṃmitīya*

1. P.V. Bapat (Ed.), *2500 Years of Buddhism*, 6<sup>th</sup> Reprint, New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1997, P. 89
2. Hirakawa Akira, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, Reprint 2007, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers, 1993, P. 115

is one of the sect classed under unorthodox form of early Buddhism which is unique in holding unconventional idea viewed as heretic from general Buddhist perspective. All the Buddhist schools of thought advocate 'no self' theory while *Sammitīya* holds existence of Pudgala which is taken as synonym for soul. Therefore, it is also known as Pudgalavāda. The sect bore the brunt of critical doctrinal attack even from almost all other Buddhist sects. However, it exhibited a dominant existence with tremendous popularity till the beginning of the Medieval period, but it now is the least-studied school of Buddhism.

This paper has made an effort with an objective to delve into the forgotten legacy of *Sammitīya* school to arouse curiosity about it so that further research can be encouraged. Also, it tried to trace the school in Nepal. The paper is prepared through the study using methodology with a historical approach. It has been qualitative, explorative, and analytical too. It incorporated information collected mainly from secondary sources. It also attempted to compare the previous view with recent scientific research to understand the issue properly, like *Pudgala*. Citation is done in MLA style.

## Origin

The *Vatsīputrīya* (Pali: *Vajjiputtaka*) or Personalist, the precursor of *Sammitīya* school of Buddhism, detached from the orthodox *Sthaviravāda* (elders) school around 280 BCE. Scholars like Bareau consider *Pudgalavāda*, known initially as *Vatsīputrīya*, to have emerged from a split among *Sthaviravāda* during the reign of Maurya king Bindusara.<sup>3</sup> Vatsīputra, a Brahman turned monk, the son of Vatsa country, capital of which was Kasambhi, is believed to be the progenitor of *Vatsīputrīya* school. He could be Vatsigotra, who was ordained during the life time of the Buddha and became an *arhat* or another monk named Vatsīputra two century later.<sup>4</sup> It emerged in the period between the 2nd century B.C. and the 1st century C.E. It is notable that *Sammitīya* regarded Mahakatyayan as their exponent.<sup>5</sup> Within the time span between third century BC to third century CE, four groups

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3. L.I. Titlin 'The Concept of Pudgala in the Buddhist school of Pudgalavada: The Problem of Interpretations and the evolution of the conception', in *Volkhonka*, 14/1 published by Department for Oriental Philosophy Studies, Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 1991. <http://cyberleninka.ru/article/v/the-concept-of-pudgala-in-the-buddhist-school-of-pudgalavada-the-problem-of-interpretation-and-the-evolution-of-the-conception>, retrieved on 09.06.2018
  4. Leonard CDC. Priestley, *Pudgalavada Buddhism: The Reality of Indeterminate self*, South Asian Studies, No. 12, Monograph No. 2, Toronto: Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Toronto, 1999, P. 35
  5. Avadesha Singh, *ChiniYatriyonKeYatraVivaran Me PratibimbītaBoudha Dharma Ka Aka Adhyayan*(Hindi) (Buddhism as reflected in Travel Account of Chinese Travelers- A Study),

of *Pudgalavāda* evolved from *Vatsiputrīya* in response to some theoretical questions of Buddhist doctrine, mainly the issues on the nature of *arhat* or difference over interpretation concerning the various levels of attainment in the Buddhist path.<sup>6</sup> They, in chronological order of time, are *Dharmottariya*, *Bhadrayanika*, *Saṃmitīya* and *Sannagarika*. Among these five groups of *Pudgalavāda*, *Saṃmitīya* is prominent and was much more widespread. As *Saṃmitīya* has a root with *Vatsiputrīya*, it is also known as *Vatsiputriya-Saṃmitīyas*.<sup>7</sup> According to *Dipavaṃśa* and *Sariputraparipreccha*, *Saṃmitīya* evolved from *Vatsiputrīya*. But *Manjushreepariprechhasūtra* mentions it to have originated from *Sarvāstivāda*.<sup>8</sup> As far as common belief goes, it was close to *Sthaviravada*. The etymological origin of *Saṃmitīya* is linked with the *arhat* Saṃmita who is believed to be the founder of the school, but his biography is unknown.<sup>9</sup> During the Gupta period, they prospered, reaching climax in the reign of Harsavardhana (606-647 C.E.).<sup>10</sup> Even princess Rajyashree, the sister of king Harshavardhan was a follower of *Saṃmitīya*.<sup>11</sup> Several other notable Buddhist groups were close to *Saṃmitīya*. They were *Tamrasatīya*, *Avantaka*, *Korukullaka*, and *Bahusrutīya*.<sup>12</sup> They were like sister concerns of *Saṃmitīya*. After the emergence of *Saṃmitīya*, *Pudgalavādins* were well represented by it. Their presence can be felt in Nepal, too; it will be discussed at the end of this paper.

## Doctrine

The *Saṃmitīya* sect, like its predecessors, claims the existence of material person (Sanskrit: *pudgala*) as a carrier of *skandhas* and, as such, was a representative (perhaps the most prominent one) of all *Pudgalavāda* schools. They are best known for their unique concept of *pudgala*, which is mostly interpreted as the self or person. The concept of self, as proposed by them, proved itself to be complicated and difficult to expound. However, it is exciting and discernible for those who wish to understand the true doctrine of the Buddha, for its followers claimed to have been sincerely loyal to the teachings of the Buddha. The

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Delhi: Ramananda VidhyaBhavan, 1987, P. 357

6. Priestley, *op.cit.* (f.n. 4), P. 36

7. NalinakshaDutt, *Buddhist Sects in India*, Delhi: MBDP, 1998, P. 181

8. Singh, *loc.cit.* (f.n. 5)

9. ThichThienChau, *The Literature of the Personalists of Early Buddhism*, Delhi: MLVDP, 1999, P. 11

10. <http://www.chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/index.php/Vatsiputriya>, retrieved on June 30, 2018

11. Singh, *op.cit.* (f.n. 5), P. 359

12. *ibid*, P. 357

*Pudgalavādins* asserted that, while there is no *ātman*, there is a *pudgala* or person, which is neither the same nor different from the *skandhas*. The *pudgala* was their method of accounting for *karma*, rebirth, and *nirvāṇa*. Other Buddhist schools held that the "person" exists only as a label, a nominal reality.

*Saṃmitīya's* concept of *pudgala* is mainly interpreted as that of *Atman* by others. Even the Buddhists advocating *Anatma* theory criticized *Saṃmitīya* followers and treated them as heretical. *Atman* is a word popularly known since the Vedic period for an eternal and permanent soul, which has remained unchanged from generation to generation of a being.

Nevertheless, the remarkable point is that *Saṃmitīyans* did not use the term *Ātma*. They preferred to call *pudgala* to give a sense to an impermanent soul, quite different from the Upanisadic conception of *Ātma*.<sup>13</sup> In the mean time they opted for *pudgala* distinguishing it from the *Anattadoctrine* of classical Buddhism. Like all other Buddhist schools the *Saṃmitīya* rejected the Brahmanical concept of an eternal soul, and on the other hand, they rejected the common Buddhist view that an individual being is nothing but the five groups with aggregates (*pañca-skandha*).

An aspirant practitioner striving for the attainment of enlightenment requires generation to generation, s/he maintains a zealous spirit throughout generations until the end of the goal. This requires something (*pudgala*) passing with its refinement.<sup>14</sup>

The only remarkable dogma of the *Saṃmitīyas* is one regarding the nature of the *pudgala*. They admitted the transitoriness (*anitya*) of material composites but, at the same time, held the opinion that there was an entity which should be distinguished from the five aggregates (*pañca-skandhas*)<sup>15</sup> that could not endure independently. It served as the carrier of the five *skandhas*, building blocks of life through the births and rebirth of beings, as they held that there is an intermediate state (*antarābhava*) between the death of a being and its rebirth.<sup>16</sup> *Pudgala* is not an organismic whole formed of constituents like five *skandhas*; it must surely be a different kind of being entirely.<sup>17</sup> If an enlightened being or a person par excellence is the one who enjoys the supreme state<sup>18</sup> or blessedness when his phenomenal constituents have vanished forever, who enjoys it. It must be the *pudgala*. *Saṃmitīya* was a

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13. Dutt, *op.cit.* (f.n. 7), P. 184

14. *ibid*

15. These five aggregates are material form, feeling, ideation, mental forces, and consciousness

16. *op.cit.*, (f.n. 10)

17. Priestley, *op.cit.*, (f.n. 4), P. 8

18. *ibid*, P.29

significant group that believed that the Buddha taught there is a real person indeterminate in relation to the five aggregates, the *pudgala*, which is inexpressible. They assert that without *pudgala*, it is not possible for the *skandhasto* transmigrate from one existence to another.<sup>19</sup> They also agreed with the *Sarvastivādins* and the *Mahāsāṃghika* in holding that the stage of an *arhat* is not immune from a fall to a lower stage and that spiritual progress is always gradual.<sup>20</sup>

It is noteworthy here that while *Saṃmitīyans* believe in the existence of *pudgala*, it does not assert that there is a permanent and unchangeable soul (*atta*), but it emphasizes the reality and importance of that personality, which seems true for practical purposes. It is probable that in practice, this belief differed little from the ordinary Brahmanic doctrine of metempsychosis, and this may be one reason for the prevalence of the Sect. *Pudgala* of *Saṃmitīyas* has nothing to do with the notion of personalism used by modern philosophers. Its interpretation is not very far from the teaching of the Buddha. Nonetheless, its central affirmation is the existence of the person as a principle which could explain the doctrine of insubstantiality (*anātmavāda*) without falling into nihilism.<sup>21</sup> Even now, we say Sākyamuni Buddha exists conceptually in person; we do not say only his '*citta* (consciousness)' has survived.

In the *Saṃmitīyan* literature, the *pudgala* is designated in three ways:  
The *pudgala* designated by the bases (*āśrayaprajñāptapudgala*),  
The *pudgala* designated by transmigration (*saṅkramaprajñāptapudgala*) and  
The *pudgala* designated by cessation (*nirodhaprajñāpatapudgala*).

### Understanding *Pudgala* from the Concept of Higgs boson

With the help of the recent concept of Higgs Boson theory discovered by scientists some years back, it would be easier to understand the working pattern of *pudgala* as projected by *Saṃmitīya* school. Higgs Boson, which comes under Particle Physics, establishes the vision that there is something that endorses particles with mass. Every physical entity has mass, which, when coupled with gravity, imparts weight to the entity. However, what caused this quality of physical entity to possess mass has remained unknown till recently, before the time of the discovery of Higgs Boson. Though the Higgs Boson concept was established through an Experiment by CERN in Spain, its particulate form is still to be proved, which

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19. Dutt, *op.cit.*, (f.n. 7) P. 183

20. *op.cit.*, (f.n. 10)

21. Chau, *op.cit.* (f.n. 9), pp. 4-5

is why it is popularly known as God's particle for its apparent invisibility.<sup>22</sup> However, the scientists involved confidently concluded that it is because of Higgs Boson (also Higg Field), the physical particles carry mass.<sup>23</sup>

*Pudgala* is considered 'Bhāra-hāra' (burden bearer), which can be interpreted as 'bearing the burden' or 'taking the burden', and *pañca-skandha* is the burden. However, in the context of the analogy, it seems to refer most naturally to the one who bears the burden. It suggests that there is a person, presumably a self in some sense, who is not the same as the five aggregates, takes up in each successive life, and is at least free of them in *Parinirvana*.<sup>24</sup>

This recently established scientific concept of Higgs Boson can be compared with *pudgala* concept of *Sammitīya* school. As Higgs Boson imparts a particle its mass but remains more or less particle-less or mass-less, which means to say invisible, much in the same way *pudgala* concept of *Sammitīya* can be likened to a factor contributing to the personality of a person. It is just an analogy postulated here to understand *pudgala* of *Sammitīyas*. Till yet, Higgs Boson remained hypothetical as it has not been physically observed; likewise, *pudgala* is also hypothetical as it is not ascertained whether it is a *Sanskrit* or *Asanskrit Dharma*. What they (*Sammitīyayans*) were projecting is about a conceptual self (*prajñapti-sat-pudgala*).<sup>25</sup> Here, a thematic comparison of *pudgala* is made with Higgs Boson, than to Genetic theory, which accounts for personal characteristic qualities because genetic engineering has revealed much concerning genes while the Higgs boson concept has not.

In Buddhism, the self is denied and interpreted as a combination of five aggregates. *Sammitīyan's pudgala* could be the binding factor/force for this combination. Higgs boson imparts mass to the particle, which gives it its identification. Likewise, *pudgala* identifies the combined aggregates.

### **Dharmakāya Concept**

It seems, then, that *Sammitīyas* thought of some aspect or dimension of the self as transcending the aggregates, and they might have identified that aspect with *Nirvāna*, which, like most early Buddhists, they regarded as an eternal reality. In its involvement with the aggregates through successive lives, the self could be seen as characterized by incessant change, but in its eternal aspect, it could be seen as having an identity that remains constant

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22. Ebook: The Higgs Boson: Searching for the God particle.

23. <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-exactly-is-the-higgs> retrieved on June 5, 2018.

24. Priestley, *op.cit.* (f.n. 4), P. 29

25. Dutt, *op.cit.*, (f.n. 7), P. 181

through all its lives until it fulfills itself in the impersonal happiness of *Parinirvāṇa*. Although their account of the self seemed unorthodox and irrational to their Buddhist opponents, the *Pudgalavādins* evidently believed that only such an account could do justice to the Buddha's moral teaching, to the accepted facts of *karma*, rebirth and liberation, and to our actual experience of selves and persons.

Undoubtedly, *Saṃmitīyas* affirmed the reality of the self or person. With scriptural authority, they held that the self of an enlightened one could not be described as non-existent after death, in complete *Nirvāṇa* (*Parinirvāṇa*), even though the five aggregates which are the basis of its identity, have then passed away without any possibility of recurrence in further life. This notion of *pudgala*, which continues from birth, rebirth and intermediate state and remains enlightened, seems to be in congruence with widely accepted *Dharmakāya* theory that later culminated in the *Ādibuddha* conception.

## Literature

With the eventual disappearance of Buddhism in India, almost all of the literature of *Saṃmitīya*, along with the other *Pudgalavādins*, was lost. The original Sanskrit texts of *Saṃmitīya* and other *Pudgalavādin* texts did not exist now except for a few available only in Chinese translation. Itsing mentioned the existence of complete Tripitaka of *Saṃmitīya* containing 200000 *slokas*. Hiuen-tsang carried 17 treatises belonging to *Saṃmitīya* from India to China.<sup>26</sup> It is known that they have separate *Vinaya* text.<sup>27</sup> Their *Vinaya* has 420 precepts. *Vinayadvaisamsatividyāsāstra* is a short *Vinaya* treatise of *Saṃmitīya*.<sup>28</sup>

*Sāṃmitīyanikāyāsāstra* (or simply *Sammitiya-śāstra*) also known as *Āśrayaprajñaptiśāstra* is the text now found in the Chinese translation. This title probably reflects the contents of the work, most of which is an attempt to explain the theory of the *pudgala*. The name of the author, the translator and the date of composition are not mentioned. The translation is supposed to be from the Chin dynasty (385-431 C.E.). There are several passages in *Kathavatthu*, giving the views of the *Saṃmitīya*. *Tridharmakāśāstra* (Treatise on the Three Laws), of *Saṃmitīya* is fifteen pages in length and comprises 223 questions and answers. It is a systematic exposition of essential doctrinal points found in the *āgamas*. The treatise deals primarily with the concept of *pudgala*.<sup>29</sup>

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26. Singh, *op.cit.*, (f.n. 5), P. 358

27. Dutt, *op.cit.*, (f.n.7), P. 182

28. Chau, *op.cit.*, (f.n. 9), P. 27

29. Thich Thien Chau 'The Literature of the Pudgalavadins', in A.K Narain (ed.) *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* edited, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1984, Pp. 8-9

*Sāriputrābhidharma-śāstra*, which is available in Chinese translation, is also believed as scripture of *Sammitīya* and other *Pudgalavāda* schools.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, *Dharmalakṣaṇa-abhidharma* is also considered of *Sammitīya* school.

It is known that *Mahāsāṃghika* used Prakrit, the *Sarvastivadins* used Sanskrit, the *Sthaviravāda* used Paisaci or Magadhi, and the *Sammitīya* used *Apavramsā*.<sup>31</sup>

Currently, several scholars are working on *Sammitīyas*. The notable ones are P. Demieville, E. Lamotte, Stcherbatsky, A Bareua, N. Dutt, L. Lindley, L. Cousins, Thich T. Chau etc.

### **Dominion of *Sammitīya***

It has already been mentioned above that the sects proliferated to about 34 sects whose presence was revealed by various Buddhist literature.<sup>32</sup> Whether we take into account 18 major Buddhist sects or 34 sects including sub-groups, only four or five had been influential in the Indian Buddhist History. The same is assumed to be true for Nepal, too. The religious situation in the valley for a long time was similar to that of pre-Islamic India.<sup>33</sup> The Chinese traveler monk Hiuen-tsang who traveled in India in the seventh century CE (629-645) took special note of the three major sects viz. the *Sammitīya*, the *Mahāsāṃghikā* and the *Sarvastivāda*.<sup>34</sup> According to him, there was prominence of *Sammitīya* school in Kapilvastu during his time.<sup>35</sup> It-sing (671-695 CE) admitted that the four principal groups of his time were *Mahāsāṃghikā* (with seven subdivisions), *Sthaviravāda* (with three subdivisions), *Sarvastivāda* (with four subdivisions), and *Sammitīya* (with four subdivisions).<sup>36</sup>

Hiuen-tsang's record shows that the *Sammitīya* was at that time by far the largest of the *Śrāvakayāna* schools (or Early Schools), equal in size to all of the other schools combined.

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30. Baiyu Watanabe, *Thoughts, Literature and Monasteries in Early Buddhism*, New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2001, P. 174

31. Zhihua Yao, *The Buddhist Theory of Self-Cognition*, London: Routledge, 2012, P. 9

32. Hirakawa, *Op.cit.*, (f.n. 2), P. 115

33. Siegfried Leinhard. 'Nepal: The Survival of Indian *Buddhism* in a Himalayan Kingdom', in *The World of Buddhism, Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Society and Culture*, Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich (Ed.), London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1984, Reprint 2007,

34. Rekha Daswani, *Buddhist Monasteries and Monastic Life in Ancient India, (From the Third Century BC to the Seventh Century AD)*, New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 2006, Pp. 62-63

35. Rhys Davids. T. W. 'The Sects of the Buddhists', in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1891, P. 415 (source: <http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-ENG/tw.htm>)

36. Daswani, *loc. cit.*, (f. n. 37),



As the monastic populations of the *Śrāvakayāna* and the *Mahāyāna* were roughly the same, the *Saṃmitīya* represented about a quarter of the entire Buddhist monastic population of India. *Saṃmitīya* evidently existed in all Buddhist centres. According to Hiuen Tsang, there were about 1000 monasteries and 66500 monks belonging *Saṃmitīya* School.<sup>37</sup> Activities of *Saṃmitīyan* were prominent in the great monastic centre, Valabhi.<sup>38</sup> They were very numerous in Vallabhi.<sup>39</sup> Through the study of inscription from Munger (Bihar, India) and Sarnath it revealed that *Saṃmitīya* replaced *Sarvāstivādins* at nearby Varanasi.<sup>40</sup>

The *Saṃmitīya* survived in India at least until the tenth century, but since the *Pudgalavādin* schools never spread to any great extent beyond the subcontinent, when Buddhism died out in India, the tradition of the *Pudgalavāda* came to an end.<sup>41</sup>

The distinguished Buddhologist Etienne Lamotte, using the writings of the Chinese traveler Hiuen-tsang, asserted that the *Saṃmitīya* were in all likelihood the most populous non-*Mahāyāna* sect in India, comprising double the number of the next largest sect,<sup>42</sup> although scholar L.S. Cousins revised his estimate down to a quarter of all non-*Mahāyāna* monks, still the largest overall.<sup>43</sup> The *Saṃmitīya* sect seems to have been particularly strong in the Sindh, where one scholar estimates 350 Buddhist monasteries were *Saṃmitīya* of a total of 450.<sup>44</sup> This area was rapidly Islamized in the wake of the Muslim conquest.<sup>45</sup>

Despite tremendous doctrinal attacks by many opposing schools, *Saṃmitīya* followers' numerical importance and constant persistence prove that *Saṃmitīya* constituted a significant branch of early Buddhism. Even after the emergence of Mahayana, the

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37. Singh, *op.cit.*, (f.n.5), P. 358

38. L.S. Cousins, 'Sakiyabhikkhu/Sayabhikkhu/Sakyabhiksu- A mistaken link to Mahayana?' in Paul Williams (Ed.), *Buddhism- Critical Concepts in Religious Studies, Vol. III, The Origins and Nature of Mahayana Buddhism; Some Mahayana Religious Topics*, London: Routledge, 2005, P. 5

39. *ibid*, P. 9

40. *ibid*, P. 9 and 20

41. Pudgalavada Buddhist Philosophy \_ Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.html, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/pudgalav/> accessed on 2017.10. 10

42. Etienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*. Paris: Peeters Press, 1988. pg 539-544

43. Paul Williams(ed.), *Buddhism: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies, Vol. 2*, London: Routledge, Pp. 84-101

44. Derryl N. Maclean, *Religion and Society in Arab Sind*, New York: E. J. Brill Leiden, 1989, P. 154

45. *ibid*

impact of *Śaṃmitīya* on the fast growth of the latter is noticeable through the existence of *ŚaṃmitīyaMahāyāna*.<sup>46</sup>

The end of the *Śaṃmitīya* sect appears to coincide with the overall disappearance of Buddhism in India. Later, *Śaṃmitīyans* were superseded by *Mahāyāna* as is seen in Nepal maṇḍala.

### ***Śaṃmitīya* in Nepal**

Though there is no inscriptional evidence to prove directly the existence of *Śaṃmitīya* school in Nepal, some logical thoughts implicitly support its existence. Hiuen-tsang's record shows the popularity of *Śaṃmitīya* in Kapilvastu<sup>47</sup>, now Tilaurakot and Lumbini region of southern Nepal. His record shows there were 3000 *Śaṃmitīyan* monks in Kapilvastu.<sup>48</sup> There were remains of more than 1000 Buddhist monasteries, and near the palace locality was an existing monastery with more than 80 inmates, adherent of the *Śaṃmitīya* School.<sup>49</sup>

### **Brian Hodgson's Account**

Renowned international scholar and pioneer introducer of Nepalese Buddhism to the western world, Brian H. Hodgson(1800-1894)<sup>50</sup>, who studied Nepalese Buddhism during his stay in Nepal for 24 years, also indicated the presence and popularity of *Śaṃmitīya* school in Nepal maṇḍala (the Kathmandu valley). He mentioned the prominence of four Buddhist schools in Nepal proper: *Swabhāvika*, *Aiśwarika*, *Yatnika*, and *Karmika*.<sup>51</sup> He believed *Swabhāvikato* be the oldest school of Buddhist philosophy.<sup>52</sup> Among them he largely discussed philosophical tenets of *Swabhāvika*.<sup>53</sup> His description is said to be based upon the

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46. Jonathan A. Silk, 'What, if anything is Mahayana Buddhism' in Paul Williams, (Ed.), *Buddhism: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*, Vol. III, *The Origins and Nature of Mahayana Buddhism; Some Mahayana Religious Topics*, London: Routledge, 2005, P. 387

47. Singh, *op.cit.* (f.n.5), 415

48. *ibid*, P. 358

49. Dr. Bipin Adhikari, 'Nepal in Yuan Chwang's Travel Records', Issue Name: Vol. 06 No. -22 May. 10- 2013 (Baishakh, 2070)

50. David M Waterhouse(Ed.), *The Origins of Himalayan Studies: Brian Houghton Hodgson in Nepal and Darjeeling 1820-1858*, London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005

51. Brian H. Hodgson, *Essayson the Languages, Literature, and Religion of Nepal and Tibet*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1991, P. 23

52. *ibid*, P. 25

53. *ibid*, P.13

details provided by his informant Pundit Amritananda Sakyabhikṣu. However, no attempt has been made to identify those schools as understood from available Buddhist literature.

From the mention of sentences from Hodgson's quotes like 'The *Swabhāvikas* deny the existence of immateriality', we can conclude that what he means by *Swabhāvika* is *Sammitīya*.<sup>54</sup> One another quote of Hodgson is worth mentioning here:

'that the most diagnostic tenets of the *Swabhāvikas* are, the denial of immateriality, and the assertion that man is capable of enlarging his faculties to infinity....'<sup>55</sup>

Here, 'denial of immateriality' can be understood as 'acceptance of material essence or corporeality'. The only Buddhist school which gave forth such a view is *Pudgalavāda* (*Sammitīya*), believing in the existence of self or personality, the *pudgala* in their terminology. Nowhere in Buddhist literature, *Swabhāvika* has been described. However, a piece of scant information is available in the name of *Swabhāvavāda*, which is mentioned as the branch of *Vaibhāsika* (*Sarvāstivāda*).<sup>56</sup> It is noteworthy here that *Manjushreepariprechhasūtra* mentions origination of *Sammitīya* from *Sarvāstivāda*.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Śākyabhikṣu* and *Paramopāsaka***

A clue to the existence of *Sammitīya* school in Nepal can be discussed from the issue of *Śākyabhikṣu* and *Paramopāsaka*. Referring to the work of G. Schopen on the study of inscriptions in India of the period from 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, L.S. Cousins gives forth the view that *Śākyabhikṣu* connoted *Pudgalavādins* (*Sammitīyans*) based upon the idea on geographical distribution of *Pudgalavādins*.<sup>58</sup> In the Buddhism of Nepal maṇḍala (now the Kathmandu valley), *Śākyabhikṣus* are prominent figures. General understanding including that of G. Schopen is that they were *Mahāyānabhikṣus*/practitioners. According to Cousins who thoroughly studied the issue and Schopen's work opines they must be *Pudgalavādins*. The Buddhists used the term *Śākyabhikṣuto* mean Buddhist monks distinguished from *Jaina* monks.<sup>59</sup> The terms *Śākyabhikṣu* and *Paramopāsaka* refer respectively to monks and devout lay persons belonging to the same group (*Pudgalavādin-Sammitīya*). Anyone can be

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54. *ibid*, P. 23

55. *ibid*, P. 24

56. RamchandraPandey, *Buddhist Studies in India*, Delhi: MotilalBanarasidass, 1975, P. 83

57. Singh, *loc.cit.* (f.n. 5)

58. Cousins, *op.cit.*, (f.n. 41), P.4

59. *ibid*, P. 3

simultaneously both a monk and a layman.<sup>60</sup> This statement seems valid in the case of Nepal, where a *Śākyabhikṣu* is a householder monk playing both the role of a monk and householding lay devout. Otherwise, *Paramopāsaka* is simply a term for a committed lay supporter of high standing while *Śākyabhikṣu* is a term used regularly to refer to members of the Buddhist monastic order.<sup>61</sup> There are inscriptions from *Licchavī* period like *Tebāhā* inscription<sup>62</sup>(of 7<sup>th</sup> century) mentioning about Priyapāl *Śākyabhikṣu* establishing water well and spout dedicating to Triple gems wishing the welfare of his parents and *Cābahil* inscription about *Śākyabhikṣu* Bandhubhadra mentioning about his generous deeds. From the inscription of Lalitpur *GuitaBahi* (of N.S. 144, probably the period of King Laxmikamadeva), *Śākyabhikṣu* named Śrī Shubhashri is known to have donated for the pavement of the ground of Śrī Saptapuri *Mahāvihāra* established by *Mahā-Paṇḍit Śākyabhikṣu* Śrī Gautamśrī.<sup>63</sup> *Mahā-Paṇḍits* in that period were those who earned fame in foreign lands especially Tibet and India.<sup>64</sup>

The designative word ‘*Paramopāsaka*’ appeared in an inscription of supposedly 600AD (belonging to the reign of Ramadeva) found in a Buddhist stone sculpture installed on the way to Lagan tole from Bhotebahal, Kathmandu. The inscription mentions the generous work of *Paramopāsaka* Manigupta.<sup>65</sup> According to Dhanabajra Vajracharya, the renowned historian, the term was used for Buddhist followers in those times.<sup>66</sup> Similarly one another Licchavi inscription from Chapahtole Ilanani also reads the ‘*Paramopāsika*’ feminized version of *Paramopāsika*. In the inscription, the liberal religious deeds of *Paramopāsika* BhoginniMrigini are highlighted.<sup>67</sup>

As revealed from the use of the designation ‘*Paramopāsaka*’ by the *Sammitīya* school, which prefers to use the very word for devout lay individuals, and the finding of inscriptions bearing it in Nepal maṇḍala indicate the presence of *Sammitīyans* in Nepal. Available data

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60. *ibid*, P. 8

61. *ibid*, P. 10

62. *ibid*, Pp.454-455

63. Dhanavajra Bajracharya, *Pūrvamadyakālakā Abhilekha*, (Kathmandu: Nepal Ra Ashiyāli Anusandhān Kendra, 2068 B.S), P. 37

64. *ibid*, P. 38

65. Dhanabajra Bajracharya, *Licchavikalaka Abhilekha* (Inscriptions of Licchavi period), Kathmandu: CNAS, 2030, P. 178

66. *ibid*,

67. *ibid*, P. 382

show the term *Paramopāsaka* was initially current among the *Pudgalavādin* schools.<sup>68</sup> This could be either a peculiarity of the school's terminology or a regional usage from some areas near Valabhi. Later, it would have spread out from this and other *Sammitīya* centres in the Pala domains adopted. Similarly, Śivadeva (1098-1126) alias Simhadeva was given the title “*paramsaugata*” for being a believer in Buddhism and for having worked for its cause.<sup>69</sup> The scholars working in the related field also linked the use of such words as *Paramopāsaka*, *Param-saugatto Sammitīyas*. Inscriptions having the designative words *Paramopāsaka*, *Param-sagauta* are found in the period from Licchavi to the early medieval period in Nepal, and that was the period *Sammitīya* school flourished.

Particular terms used frequently in a particular time frame indicate a definite historical picture. For example, *Mahāsāṃghika* had used the term *Ārya Saṅgha* for their *saṅgha* instead of using other words like *Jina sangha*, *Śākya sangha*, *Śākyabhikṣu sangha* and so forth. Similarly, democracy was denoted by the term *Prajātantra* from the time of the Rana regime till the time of the end of *Panchāyat* system in Nepal. The word ‘*Gaṇatantra*’ gained popularity after the collapse of the *Panchāyat* system. Later, the term *Lokatantra* was used to mean democracy after the new constitution was promulgated and the same has been employed frequently since then. Till the time of *Panchāyat* rule, to develop means ‘*Vikāśako Mūlphutaune*’, and now it has changed to *Samvridhi* in the *Lokatantra* phase. Likewise, the terms *Paramopāsaka* and *Param-saugata* were extensively used by *Sammitīyas* during their existential period. The jargons are no longer used after the disappearance of *Sammitīyas*.

## Deification Practice

Ritual deification is an integral practice in Nepalese Buddhism. The essence of the deity is visualized in material form (in person), and it's taking in and out of the idol or image as required is practiced by the Buddhist practitioners (*Vajrācāryas*). The divinity or godness of an idol or sculpture is transferred to a sacred vessel, *Kalaśa* and required denting and repainting of the sculpture is done as if it is a lifeless object. Afterwards, the godly essence is ritualistically reinstalled into the image, ensuring its liveliness and *daśakarma* (ten rites) are carried out, consecrating it as a fresh one. The process is periodically done once a year or every twelve years. This material essence transfer of divinity must have a link with *Sammitīya* on philosophical grounds. One popular saying among aficionado Westerners is that the gods' lives are at the hands of *Vajrācāryas*.

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68. Cousins, *op. cit.*, (f.n. 41), P. 9

69. Luciano Petech, *Medieval History of Nepal (c. 750-1482)*, Roma: Institute Italiano Per II, Medio Ed Estremo Oriente, 1984, P. 203

## **Syncretism**

It is well known that the Nepalese form of Buddhism has coexisted with Hinduism, and the two have several elemental fusions. The *Pudgalavāda* of *Sammitīya* is taken grossly similar to *Ātmavāda* of Hinduism in general understanding. A similar philosophical ground must have brought Buddhism and Hinduism together and imparted a harmonious ambience in feeling and practice.

## **Conclusion**

*Sammitīya* was a pre-Mahayanic school in the beginning; later, it went in parallel with *Mahāyāna*. Having quite different views from classical Buddhism, it poses a question on comprehension of Buddha's teaching. A thorough study of their views is required to understand correctly the exact teachings of the Buddha. Buddhism is like an ocean of knowledge. Several doctrinal views forwarded by the particular sects/subsects were ridiculed and contentious at the onset, but they proved later to be scientific. For example, the theory of momentary-ness of *Sautrantika*, which advocates *dharma* to be momentary, a characteristic that the *dharma* entity perished immediately after its origination, which was once considered by opponents unbelievable, has now become justifiable through a scientific approach.

Similarly, the *Sammitīyan* concept of *pudgala* may find scientific approval. A mediocre hint has been forwarded in the article by the thematic scheme compared between *Sammitīyan-pudgala* concept and Higgs Boson concept currently known in the scientific circle. The historical presence of *Sammitīya* can not be ignored for logical reasons. In order to widen these views, further research is required. The existence of *Mahāsāṃghika* and *Sarvāstivāda* is well hinted at in the history of Buddhism in Nepal. The Buddhist cultural tradition and practice extant in Nepal maṇḍala still contain considerable elements of *Mahāsāṃghika* and *Sarvāstivāda*, which have imparted uniqueness to the Nepalese form of Buddhism. Equally possible is the existence and influence of *Sammitīya* in Nepal, which still needs to be properly explored. These three Buddhist sects *Mahāsāṃghika*, *Sarvāstivāda* and *Sammitīya* existed in parallel contemporarily with *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* for some centuries, as was the case in India. Later, they mingled into the *Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna* fold, which retained some of their traces. The existence of *Sarvāstivādin-Mahāyāna* and *Sammitīya-Mahāyāna* have shown their existence in India.<sup>70</sup> They may be equally valid in

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70. Silk, *op.cit.*,(f.n. 49), P. 387

the Nepalese context too. Such issues can be solved only through further research. The present paper is only an attempt to invite such research in future.

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